

Interfaith Scotland

Magazine Autumn 2023: Issue 40

Making a Difference through Dialogue



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Message From The Director

I am always deeply humbled by the incredible interfaith dialogue and action that takes place in Scotland and this Autumn edition of our Interfaith Magazine offers a glimpse of that ongoing creative engagement.

This magazine is published in October and within a month one of the most important conferences in the world will be taking place in Dubai – COP28. At COP28 the governments of the world will be deciding the future of humanity as they grapple with what we have to do to avert the climate crisis. The latest scientific report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has sadly stated that greenhouse gas emissions are projected to continue rising. What does this mean and what can we as faith communities, interfaith groups and climate activists do? The report makes many sensible and urgent recommendations for governments, communities and individuals and just one of those suggestions could be implemented immediately and that is to cut down on our over-consumption of the world's finite and limited resources.

The Scottish Interfaith Week theme for 2023 (12-19 November) is Community and already we are seeing events being planned that explore what communities can do to live more sustainably (and potentially more happily). I would encourage all of you to host an event or attend an event that offers opportunities to galvanise community activism and make a difference collectively. As we move towards Autumn, we continue to remain hopeful that together we can and do make a difference.

Dr Maureen Sier, Director



Dr Maureen Sier, Director

Message From The Editor

This is the 40th edition of Interfaith Scotland's Magazine. The first magazine was published in January 2003 and for the last 20 years we have been delighted to share with you the inspiring interfaith events and activities taking place across Scotland. It has been a privilege to edit the magazine over the last 15 of those years.

**Frances Hume,
National Development Officer**



Frances Hume,
National Development Officer

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‘Creating an Interfaith Vision Together’

On 11 May Interfaith Scotland was delighted to gather with our members to celebrate our new inclusive constitution and to ‘Create an Interfaith Vision Together’.

The event began with everyone present enjoying a celebratory lunch and was followed by a welcome from Interfaith Scotland Board Member, Susan Siegel from the Jewish Community. Sr Isabel Smyth from the Catholic Bishops Committee for

Inter-religious Dialogue and Srihari Vallabhajousula from the Hindu Community shared, with those present, the different steps taken by the Constitutional Review Group to create the new constitution and explained why such an important document had

been almost three years in the making. All those present expressed deep appreciation for the care taken in the development of the new constitution and thereafter an enjoyable afternoon was spent building our Interfaith Vision for Scotland moving forward.

Holding Hope in the Face of Hate: Interfaith Scotland Scottish Refugee Festival Event

In June another enjoyable event was held in the Interfaith Scotland Dialogue Centre. The Holding Hope in the Face of Hate event was held as part of Scottish Refugee Festival 2023.

Sabine from the Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees, Ghanima from the Interfaith Glasgow Weekend Club and Grace from the International Welcome Club all expertly shared practical ways that faith communities could welcome and support refugees and asylum seekers in Scotland.

The Dialogue that followed allowed those present to look to themselves, individually, and their faith communities, collectively, to see what they could do to increase their support for some of the most vulnerable people in our society who have sought sanctuary on our shores. Sadly,



only one week prior to the Interfaith Scotland event, the Director was witness to an anti-asylum seeker rally in her home town of Elgin. Thankfully those who were protesting the support

for asylum seekers were drowned out by the voices of the people of Elgin who strongly gave the message that asylum seekers and refugees were welcome there.





Faces of Faith Exhibition and Dialogues

The beautiful Faces of Faith exhibition continues to tour Scotland and has recently been erected in Dundee Central Library, Street Level Photoworks at Trongate 103 in Glasgow, the Findhorn Foundation in Morayshire and the Grain Exchange in Ayr.

Dialogue events were held in Dundee, Findhorn and Ayr to celebrate the exhibition being in situ. A selection of folk featured in the exhibition spoke to those gathered about their faith story and the importance of diversity.



Faith and Belief Engagement with Humza Yousaf, First Minister of Scotland

The Director and Board Members of Interfaith Scotland were honoured to be present at the faith and belief reception hosted by the First Minister of Scotland at Edinburgh Castle.

The event was attended by members of all faith communities, civic society, charities and religious leaders. The First Minister thanked the faith communities for their valuable contribution to Scotland during challenges such as the pandemic but also in bringing communities together. Iain Stewart, from Edinburgh Interfaith Association, was able to share the importance of interfaith engagement at the local and

national level. He shared that there is much to be proud of and to celebrate in terms of the strength of interfaith and community relations in Scotland, which are regarded as leading internationally, and also the strength of the relationship between the Scottish Government and faith and interfaith groups. The First Minister reiterated how vital interfaith work is to Scotland.



Scotland Abroad Faith Exchange:

Interfaith Engagement with the Berlin Senate Department for Culture and Religions for Peace, Europe

Interfaith Scotland was delighted to welcome the Berlin Senate Department for Culture and representatives of Religions for Peace, Europe for a three-day interfaith learning exchange.

Over the course of the three-day visit, Interfaith Scotland was able to organise deep dialogue sessions with staff and board members of Interfaith Scotland and representatives of interfaith and faith communities from across Scotland. In addition, Samina Ansari, Head of Communities and Inclusion at Volunteering Matters and Safa Yousaf, Programme Coordinator for the Muslim Women's Resource Centre, were able to add further depth to the dialogue by sharing their experiences as Muslim women in Scotland.



The delegation also enjoyed a private tour of the Scottish Parliament and two evening receptions (one in East Dunbartonshire and one in Edinburgh) where there were further opportunities for the delegation to engage with the Scottish Government Religion and Belief Team representative, Lara Cook, Foyso Choudhury MSP and additional faith community members.

On the final day Dr Inderjit Singh, Interfaith Scotland Board Member and representative of the Berkeley Street Gurdwara, welcomed the delegation to the Gurdwara where a delicious vegetarian lunch was served. Further engagements are planned for 2024 and the delegation members were impressed by the work done by the interfaith and faith community organisations in Scotland.

Intergenerational Interfaith Buddies

In April, Interfaith Scotland held an interfaith buddies event with Dundee Interfaith Group. This was an intergenerational event where young people from the advisory board met members of the local group.

Each person from the advisory board was paired with a person from the Dundee Interfaith Group and they would talk for 20 minutes in their pairs about their faith journey before moving

on to the next buddy. Participants had the opportunity to meet others from a variety of ages and faiths and hear their personal stories. All found it to be a great success.



National Interfaith Youth Advisory Board

Scottish Interfaith Week will mark the completion of the first year of the National Interfaith Youth Advisory Board. We have had incredible engagement from the young people. They have taken part in events, attended training sessions, planned and executed sessions at a retreat and so much more. We are looking forward to more activities and projects with the board.

Interfaith Interactions

Interfaith Scotland started a new dialogue series called Interfaith Interactions in May. We invited speakers from different faith and belief backgrounds to talk about a specific theme from their perspective.

In May the theme was 'Kingship' taking inspiration from the King's Coronation and what the different faiths had to say about the concept of Kingship. A summary of the talks on Kingship can be found in the Feature articles section on page 20 of the magazine. For the month of June, the theme was hospitality for Refugee Festival Scotland. Sr Isabel Smyth from the Catholic faith, Dr Jane Tobias from the Jewish faith and Madiah Ansari from the Islamic faith spoke about how faith communities provide hospitality to everyone and shared specific texts from their respective scriptures on the theme. They elaborated on the history of migrant settlers in their respective faiths and the role of food in connecting people. After a break for the summer, the theme for September was 'Women and Leadership'. Our speakers were Ravinder Kaur Nijjar from the Sikh Faith, Chair of the Religions for Peace Women of Faith Network; Rev Gilleen Richmond, a Church of Scotland minister and Marilyn Gordon from the Brahma Kumaris, Inner Space Meditation Centre in Glasgow.



Recordings of the talks are available to view on our YouTube channel at tinyurl.com/InterfaithInteractions. You can also scan the QR Code to view the video playlist.

Cross Party Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief

The Cross Party Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief, chaired by John Mason MSP, met on 31 May at the Scottish Parliament Building.

John Pontifex who represents the organisation Aid to the Church in Nigeria gave a talk on Defending Religious Liberty in Nigeria. John's role in public affairs is to meet the survivors of persecution in their countries and to listen to their accounts of persecution. John shared that Nigeria is one of the worst countries for religious persecution in the world today. There have been deadly attacks on churches and mosques with members of the congregation and priests killed. 7600 Christians have been reported killed between January 2021 and June 2022 with eight churches under attack. Aid to the Church in Need is standing up for both Christians and Muslims suffering for the failure to enforce the rule of law.

Father Abayoni was attending Mass at St Francis Xavier's Church in Owo, a town in south-west Nigeria. The church was packed with parishioners as it was Pentecost Sunday, 5 June 2022. Shots were fired and explosives thrown. Someone was able to lock the entrance door and encourage people into the sacristy. Children and adults clung to Father Abayoni and he sheltered them. They asked

to be saved and to please pray for them. More explosions and shooting of guns were heard inside the church. 41 people were killed and 80 injured. Margaret was in the church gallery singing in the choir when gunmen began shooting. She rushed downstairs and was caught in the blast. She lost both legs and her sight in one eye during the attack. On the day of the massacre the perpetrators were sitting in the congregation. As yet nobody has been charged in connection with the atrocity in a church packed with witnesses. Margaret said that the lack of justice for the atrocity makes many people feel insecure and gives the perpetrators more power to continue with their evil deeds.

The day after the massacre at Owo, Fiona Bruce, Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion and Belief, stood up in Parliament and demanded that the UK Government give a statement in response to the massacre. Bishops in Nigeria called for people to sign a petition to the UK Government on the first anniversary of the massacre. Fiona Bruce took receipt of the petition on 5 June 2023.

"We request that the UK Government call on their Nigerian counterparts to bring to justice those responsible for genocidal attacks such as the Pentecost Sunday 2022 massacre and countless other killings, abductions and other atrocities".

Religion isn't the only driver of violence - the situation is antagonised by politicisation and the illegal spread of arms. However religion is often underrepresented as a factor driving this conflict. Bishop Jude and others have attributed the violence to ISWAP (Islamic State's West Africa Province). They wish to make clear that these attacks are not destroying the faith of the Christian communities of Nigeria. Their campaign is called 'Out of these ashes'. Ben Kwashi quotes in his book that despite the suffering of the people, out of these ashes the Christian community is working to bring transformation, is willing to forgive their attackers and is not defeated.

Solas Festival

Interfaith Scotland was invited to provide an interfaith input at the Solas Festival which took place at Errol Park in Perthshire from 16 - 18 June. Solas is a Christian creative arts festival that is open to people of all faiths and none.

The National Development Officer co-ordinated and supported a team of six volunteers from all across Scotland (Glasgow, Stirling, Aberdeen, Loanhead and Livingston). The volunteers ran a stall at the festival which featured an updated exhibition and flyers about the work of Interfaith Scotland. Alongside the stall our volunteers Nila Joshi and Sonia Chand provided free henna tattoos for passers-by.



We ran a special event at the festival entitled 'Sewing Seeds of Hope'. Our volunteers shared about how their faith has given them hope in life in the light of the pandemic. Inspiring talks were given by Ven Ajahn Sujana, Abbot of the Varapunya Meditation Centre in Aberdeen; Sheikh Hassan Rabbani, chaplain of Heriot-Watt University; Jeremy Fox, Honorary Baha'i Chaplain at the University of Stirling; and Nila Joshi, Hindu representative and leader of Edinburgh Women's Interfaith Group.



Sheikh Hassan Rabbani was also invited to be part of a panel discussion with members of various Christian organisations on how faith communities could bring hope to wider society.



Ajahn Sujana led a Buddhist meditation in a special yurt that was set up for health and wellbeing sessions at the Festival. As he walked around the festival with another monk who had accompanied him, he was frequently stopped and asked questions by those who may have never met a monk from a different religion!

The contribution from Interfaith Scotland was very well received and we look forward to a fruitful collaboration with the Solas Festival team for years to come.

St Patrick's Primary School

The National Development Officer delivered three classes at St Patrick's Primary School in Shotts to Primary 5 - 7 pupils. This involved a presentation on the importance of interfaith dialogue and the 'religious objects' game which was requested as pupils were learning about religious artifacts.





Interfaith Retreat to Holy Isle

On Thursday 3 August a merry band of 21 pilgrims from seven different faiths made their way from all over the country to the beautiful Holy Isle off the island of Arran for a three-day interfaith retreat hosted by Interfaith Scotland.

A pilgrimage can be seen as an external journey that encourages an inner journey, opening us up to inspiration and renewal in our daily lives. An interfaith pilgrimage is particularly special as learning from our different faith and belief perspectives we can enrich one another on our journey through sharing these personal experiences with one another.

Holy Isle has long been a place of pilgrimage. The earliest recorded name for the island is 'Inis Shroin', which is Old Gaelic for 'Island of the Water Spirit'. St Molaise, a Christian saint from Ireland, lived as a hermit on the island in the 6th Century and is said to have performed many miracles. We visited the cave on the island where he lived. Near the cave is a spring which is said to have healing powers for those who drink from it. Holy Isle was bought by Rokpa Trust in 1992 under the guidance of Lama Yeshe, a Tibetan Buddhist meditation master. The Centre for World Peace and Health was built with the intention to become a focal point for interfaith work and retreat. We visited the beautiful Tibetan Buddhist rock carvings along our pilgrimage route across the island.



During the retreat we explored our faith and belief journeys through creative mediums such as music, art, writing, prayer and meditation. We were delighted that members of our National Interfaith Youth Advisory Board helped to design and run the programme with us this year and a particularly beautiful and moving interfaith meditation was created and led by board member Zainab. There was plenty of opportunity for dialogue as we looked at the concepts of wisdom and compassion from the scriptures of different faiths. There was also plenty of time for fun – walking to the top of the island for the adventurous, a boat trip around the island, playing the 'Diversity Game'

and a cultural evening sharing song, dance and trying on clothes from different faiths and cultures.

During the retreat we were delighted to be joined by a journalist from BBC Alba who created a wonderful report of our time together which can be viewed at the link below or by scanning the QR code

<https://tinyurl.com/HolyIsle2023-BBC>





Religious Leaders Meeting

The Autumn meeting of the Scottish Religious Leaders' Forum took place at the home of The Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, the Rt Rev Sally Foster-Fulton.

The meeting was a very full one and the agenda items covered the climate crisis, poverty, hate crime, Scottish Interfaith Week and working together for the common good. During the meeting the Forum was joined by Val Brown the Director of Christian Aid and a joint statement from Christian Aid and the Scottish Religious Leaders Forum will be sent to Governments gathered at COP28 asking them to honour their commitment to the Loss and Damage Fund which was agreed in principle at COP27. All those gathered reflected that this was the 1st anniversary of

their time on Iona together where they made their Declaration of Commitment to work together to respond to the Climate Crisis. The Forum also registered their deep disappointment at the UK Government back tracking on some of their climate commitments and a short statement to that effect was sent to the press.

The Religious Leaders also spoke at length about how they could work together to help alleviate the poverty crisis in their communities and were delighted to support the Poverty

Alliance for Challenge Poverty Week 2023 (see pictured above). A renewed statement of commitment to the Asylum Seeker bus pass campaign was also prepared in partnership with the Poverty Alliance.

Later Lucy Allan and Katy Betchley from the Scottish Government Hate Crime Team met with the Forum Members and updated them on the Government's Hate Crime Strategy and implementation. The meeting was a very full one and everyone present stated their appreciation to the Moderator for her kind hospitality.

Our Climate Commitments Continued

Interfaith Scotland continues to chair the Scottish Interfaith Climate Justice Group and to sit on the Interfaith Liaison Committee to the UNFCCC and finds the work to be of profound importance in the face of the climate crisis that humanity is facing. We were honoured to have Climate Scientist, Liz Dovey from the University of Canberra visit Scotland for 10 days where she shadowed the Director of Interfaith Scotland at the interfaith Climate Meetings taking place. Liz stated that 'learning how faith communities in Scotland have responded to the climate crisis has been a deep learning experience and one that I will take back to my work in Australia and the Pacific'. Liz and the Director of Interfaith Scotland visited the 'Rising Tide' exhibition at the National Museum of Scotland where they had an in-person meeting with Steve Percival a renowned Pacific artist from Samoa. The exhibition is a stark reminder of the terrible impacts of the climate crisis on Island nations. We are also deeply honoured that Adrian Shaw (pictured above) has agreed to become our Interfaith Climate Justice Associate and we look forward to continuing our engagement with Adrian whose deep understanding of the climate crisis informs our work.



Steve Percival, Director of the Tiapapata Art Centre



Interfaith Climate Justice Associate, Adrian Shaw, and Climate Scientist Liz Dovey



Representatives of Interfaith Scotland, Canberra University, the Tiapapata Art Centre, Samoa, and the University of St. Andrews at the Rising Tide exhibition in Edinburgh

Training Days

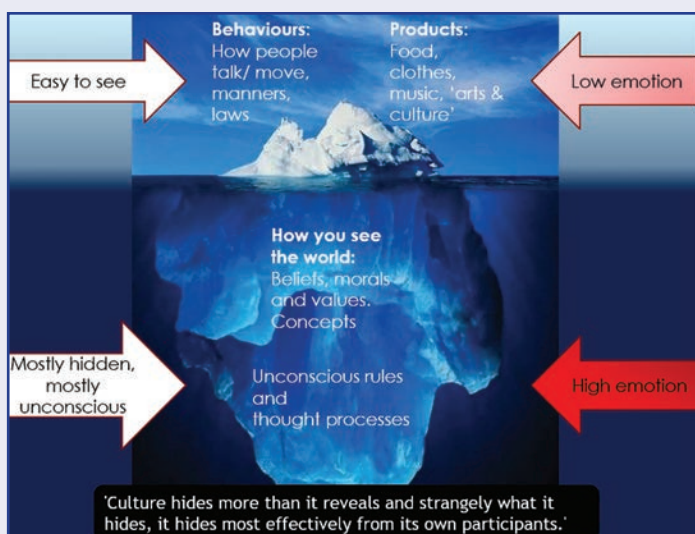


Volunteers Training Days

The National Development Officer Frances Hume hosted a Volunteers Training Day on 17 April at Interfaith Scotland's dialogue centre. This was attended by four new volunteers, three long-term volunteers refreshing their skills, a member of the Youth Advisory Board and two new members of Interfaith Scotland's Board. Frances also travelled to Edinburgh to assist in training schools volunteers who are leading sessions in primary schools on behalf of the Edinburgh Interfaith Association.

Training on Interpreting Culture

As requests for in-person training are becoming more frequent again, our trainer Jamie Spurway has been out and about providing sessions around the country. In the last few weeks, he travelled to Edinburgh to work with a group of staff from Edinburgh Napier University – adding to our growing list of university audiences. The session explored the impact of cultural diversity on the academic context and in particular considered how a person's cultural background shapes how they interpret behaviour, policies etc. One of the key challenges that came up is how to encourage class participation from students whose cultural background is one where typically they are expected to passively listen to the lecturer without being expected to ask or answer questions. As is usually a part of the discussion around cultural difference we also explored the widely differing perceptions of rudeness and politeness – an element that often causes embarrassment and can even lead to deep divisions if not handled properly. We also discussed Edward T. Hall's popular iceberg metaphor for culture which describes how 'Culture hides more than it reveals and strangely what it hides, it hides most effectively from its own participants'.



Workshops on religious diversity for 'early years practitioners'

For some years now we have been providing training for students at Experiential Play, an organisation that trains people who are planning a career working with pre-school children.

The workshop explores religious diversity and gives an outline of six world faiths through a mixture of interactive activities. The challenges of managing the needs related to religion and belief in a context where the children may have a very limited understanding of their own faith or belief identity is explored. For example, discussions may touch on how to manage when a child of a Jehovah's Witness family does not celebrate birthdays or where children do not understand why they cannot eat the same things as other children. Another example might be how to respond when children ask questions that relate to faith and belief, such as 'What happens when we die?' or 'Are angels real?'





Launch of the Scottish Government Faith and Belief Engagement Strategy

Former Minister for Equalities and Older People, Christina McKelvie, launched the Scottish Government Faith and Belief Engagement Strategy on 22 March.

The strategy makes clear the Scottish Government's commitment to strengthen communication and collaboration with Scotland's diverse faith and belief communities, and it sets out a vision for improved engagement and the principles underpinning

good engagement. The strategy recognises that government policy will be improved by reflecting a better knowledge and understanding around faith and belief, and it focuses on interfaith dialogue and collaboration which will further support community

cohesion across Scotland. The Faith and Belief representatives group, which includes a representative from Interfaith Scotland, has worked closely with The Scottish Government to develop the strategy and the photograph includes members of this group.

Scottish Interfaith Week 2023: Community

Scottish Interfaith Week is taking place from 12 - 19 November 2023 on the theme of 'Community'. Striving for change on our own is an insurmountable challenge. Striving for change together is when we can have the biggest impact.

Scotland's people continue to be a positive movement for change. Over recent years we have stood together for our planet, the rights of women, refugees and all those affected by injustice around the world. But big change always starts small. By tending to our friends, our neighbours, and our local communities, we can challenge loneliness, break down stereotypes and nurture resilient relationships.

This Scottish Interfaith Week we invite people across Scotland to open their

doors and organise meals, workshops, coffee mornings, family fun days, concerts, gatherings and more. Local choirs, book clubs, interfaith groups, places of worship, schools, family support networks, and other community groups are the perfect places to start! Through building sustainable communities, we can create a collective voice for change.

Find event planning resources and the event submission form on www.scottishinterfaithweek.org



Local Interfaith Groups News

Aberdeen Interfaith Group

You, Me and a Cup of Tea

You, Me and 350 or so Cups of Tea, coffee or juice were served at five 'You, Me and a Cup of Tea' events around the North East of Scotland, before, during or after Refugee Festival Scotland. The events were held in Daviot, Huntly, Ellon, Aberdeen and Elgin. As the Aberdeen Interfaith Group Committee gained a new member in Constable Sarah Grant, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion officer for Grampian Police, we ventured much further than usual. With a generous grant from Refugee Festival Scotland and six wonderful volunteer organisers, Kim, Mary, Undra, Isaac, Sarah-Anne and Sister Imelda from the different towns, we were able to bring together international teams to prepare, serve, host and welcome our visitors.



Our Chairperson also had the honour of speaking at Culsalmond, Rayne and Daviot Church as well as St Andrews Cathedral on the theme of hospitality and sanctuary. The congregations were given an orange heart to write a message of hope for those who have come here seeking safety from war and persecution.

A huge variety of homemade cakes and savouries bedecked the tables at the events including falafel, mamoul and mshabak from Syria and honey cake from Ukraine. One very special cake, made by Angela, adorned the table in Elgin as a special welcome

to people from all over the world. The audience listened to personal stories from our refugee and asylum friends Olga, Farhad, Omar and Usam which moved them greatly. We were so grateful too for the talents of our storyteller, Anna and our crafty ladies, Ilona, Angela, Saima, Raquel, Olga and all the crocheters of the orange hearts as well as Mary on her fiddle, the Melting Pot Collective who have gained a few new members from among our asylum seeker new friends, our three Ukrainian singers and pupils of Heathryfold Primary School who made welcome posters for our new folk at Westhill.

Patricia Findlay from Aberdeen Interfaith Group shared, "From a seed of an idea, to meet for a cuppa and chat, grew a tree which had first of all five branches and looks as if it will sprout new roots and little seedlings which will reach out beyond those events and the people present to many more. One lady even wanted to take the idea to the USA. Everyone wanted to know when the next one would be and even one of our new helpful friends asked if it could happen weekly. None of this would have taken place if it had not been for the amazing, enthusiastic volunteers who gave their time over the past few months".

Constable Sarah Grant shared, "The initial idea for the 'You, Me and a Cup of Tea' events grew well beyond our expectations which shows there is a demand



for events like these and also showcases the incredible community spirit within the Grampian area. It has been a thoroughly enjoyable experience meeting new people from all different walks of life, with different skills and talents. From the planning, right through to the actual tea parties, each event has been unique, spreading hope, joy and positive messages within the local communities".

An attendee shared, "Today's event gave me more hope that the world still has caring people. It reinforced my determination to lobby Government on the issue of human rights especially of asylum seekers and refugees, as I was one myself once".



Interfaith Mindfulness Day at the Buddhist Centre in Aberdeen

In collaboration with Aberdeen Interfaith Group, the Varapunya Meditation Centre (VMC) organised the 7th 'Interfaith Mindfulness Day' at the Buddhist Centre in Westhill on Saturday 20 May, with participants from various religious, faith and belief groups. The event usually follows the annual theme of the Scottish Government for 'Mental Health Week', which in 2023 is 'Anxiety'.

Anxiety is the second most common mental health condition in the world. It can be experienced in various ways, physically, emotionally, and mentally. Everyone has gone through a mode of fight or flight at different times in their lives which is normal as long as it does not control you. One of the most recommended skills to control anxiety is mindfulness meditation and that positively resonated during the afternoon discussion on the day. Dr Winning writes in her article that



'meditation and mindfulness are the most valuable and helpful life skills which not only enhance wellbeing generally but can equip us with techniques and tools to reduce stress and anxiety'.

Ajahn Sujana, a Nepalese born monk trained in Thailand, a resident at the VMC, and long term active member of Aberdeen Interfaith Group, welcomed 30 participants to the Centre and led mindful walking through the contemplative woodland that the Centre is working on developing. Sujana introduced the walk by asking everyone to feel the atmosphere, connect with nature and enjoy the moment surrounded by beautiful people of all faiths. After that members of AIFG and others experienced Buddhist blessings and the traditional offering of food, "dana" which led to making new friends over the



meal, which was sponsored by VMC members.

The afternoon session began with insightful reflections from different religious and faith representatives on 'Anxiety' that led to a wonderful discussion and deep sharing. Most of the reflections were compiled into a book by Sujana, which was distributed to all and is still available. One of the attendees shared, "I can't express how grateful I am to have come across the Aberdeen Interfaith Group. I have long been searching for a community made up of people from different religions/faiths/perspectives and this group is exactly that... like myself, all together celebrating one another's viewpoints and learning from each other's cultures. I have finally found it".

Ajahn Sujana

Dumfries and Galloway Interfaith Group



The Dumfries and Galloway Interfaith Group has had a busy few months! During July we were involved in the development of the Council's Burial Strategy and arrangements, and received a very positive reception from Council staff about how they should be accommodating different faith requirements. Group members contributed to an in-person 'Community Conversation' and an online 'stakeholder' event. The Council team developing the Strategy are looking at other parts of Scotland too, so we hope that good practice there will also influence the updated arrangements here in the southwest.

Our Group was invited to be part of a very special event on 9 June when the Royal Regiment of Scotland

exercised its Freedom of Dumfries and Galloway by marching through the town. Along with Lord Lieutenants, Council Convener, Provost of Dumfries and other dignitaries, Jan and John Lethbridge were part of the reception party at the salute of the bands and soldiers (and the Regimental Mascot Shetland pony Corporal Cruachan IV). The inclusion of our interfaith group members complemented the traditional Church of Scotland Chaplains at the event.

We continue to support the work of our region's Resettlement Board which has Syrian, Afghan and Ukraine 'New Scots' and are also working with other local organisations as we plan for the arrival of asylum seekers in a contingency hotel. We have provided the Home



Office contracted company Mears with a list of local worship opportunities and notified the neighbouring faith communities of this opportunity to give a warm welcome to these very vulnerable people in the spirit of shared values across all faith traditions.



East Renfrewshire Faith Forum

The national development officer met with members of the East Renfrewshire Faith Forum for their first in-person meeting after the pandemic. The meeting took place at East Renfrewshire Council headquarters and was hosted by the Lord Provost Mary Montague. The group is keen to look at strategies for moving the group forward and a follow-up meeting was held with committee members looking at future events.



Edinburgh Interfaith Association

Striving For Change

A focus of our programmes from March to June 2023 has centred around the theme of 'Striving for Change.' In March our International Women's Day event, chaired by Shipra Kohli, titled 'Breaking the Glass Ceiling', brought together two inspiring women, Fiona Smith (the first permanently appointed Principal Clerk to the Church of Scotland) and Trishna Singh OBE (founder/director of Sikh Sanjog, the only Sikh Family Support charity in Scotland) as they exchanged stories on how they had and continue to overcome obstacles to equality within their respective faiths. The event was tremendously well received with many people reporting how they had learned a great deal about the Church of Scotland and Sikhism, and that equality was central to these and other faiths but that great barriers were cultural and not religious. Our Youth Coordinator Sofia Lanza made the closing remarks.



In May we were asked by the organisers of the King's Coronation to bring forward our annual 'Interfaith Peace Walk' to coincide with other Peace Walks happening across the UK. We thought that this was important not only to bring people of faith together in solidarity and friendship, but as a visible and colourful symbol of the great strength and contribution that faith communities make to modern

Scotland and Britain. And as we strive for greater and fairer representation across our faith communities in all aspects of civic and public life we thought it was crucial that Scotland's faith communities were represented in these 'Walks of Faith.'

During this period we continued to roll out our 'Religion and Belief Roadshows' across schools in Edinburgh and Falkirk/Stirling. We have been overwhelmed by the positive response and unprecedented demand for these programmes which see six faith and belief and two Police Scotland representatives come together to run fun interactive workshops in schools, promoting respect and understanding for our rich cultural and religious diversity.

There were three particularly powerful online Edinburgh Interfaith Programmes that we would like to highlight, our March and May Interfaith Insights Programmes, and our June Future



of Faith Programme. The first dealt with the incredible humanitarian work of the Islamic-rooted 'World Cares Charity' which has been providing vital emergency aid to earthquake victims in Turkey and Syria. Our May episode for International Day Against Homophobia saw Sikh leader and LGBTQI activist Jasvir Singh, CBE of City Sikhs, share his insights into his campaign for LGBTQI rights. In June Etienne Kubabo, the esteemed film maker, was joined by a panel of guests on our powerful youth programme, including Yahya Barry Community Development Regional Lead (Scotland and Northern Ireland) for the Film and TV Charity as they discussed his new Scottish based film the 'The Difference Between Us' which deals with 'What it means to be black in the modern world and issues around racism and prejudice.'

On 20 June our Executive Director Iain Stewart attended a Muslim News



Award Ceremony in London as the sole Scottish nominee and one of only three nominees put forward for the Annemarie Schimmel Award as chosen by readers for 'Championing a Muslim Cause.'

We would like to dedicate this piece to the memory of our late great friends Jaime Carsi our former trustee and his late wife Mary Sommerville whose openness and compassion was the embodiment of true interfaith. You will be forever in our hearts!

Edinburgh Women's Interfaith Group



The Edinburgh Women's Interfaith Group (EWIG) is a safe, open and informal group welcoming women of all faiths and none. On Saturday 31 July, we organised a summer trip to Kirkcaldy. A bus full of women and children from diverse faiths enjoyed a memorable day together. The group visited Pathhead church in the morning. We received a very warm welcome

from church volunteers. We were given a talk on the history of the church which made the experience more meaningful and enjoyable. After the talk church members provided a lovely tea, coffee, cake, home baking and biscuits!

In the afternoon the group visited Burntisland for a seaside picnic followed by a lovely walk beside the

sea. Our journey home was enlivened by some folk and Bollywood songs! We really enjoyed our summer outing with its opportunity to meet with women of other faiths in a relaxed and informal way. All in all, it was a wonderful and spiritually uplifting day. We are very grateful to the Sylvia Marshall Bequest Group for part-funding our summer trip.

Interfaith Glasgow



After the devastating news that Interfaith Glasgow's funding from Glasgow City Council would not be renewed for 2023-24, our staff and volunteers quickly got to work planning a fundraising event that would challenge us and inspire others to donate. It was decided that we would band together – in a group ranging in age from 6 to 71 years old, from a wide range of faith backgrounds – to climb Ben A'an, with an optional dip in a freezing loch afterwards! The group had a wide range of hillwalking abilities, and the challenge it posed to many of us was significant. In a sea of orange Interfaith Glasgow t-shirts, every single one of us reached the summit, and we raised over £7,000 in the process, thanks to our generous supporters! This money will be crucial in helping us to continue delivering dialogue initiatives and our Weekend Club for refugees; and coordinating the Interfaith Food Justice Network in the

year ahead, as we seek longer-term funding. Thank you to all who walked, supported from base camp, and donated!

In addition to our fundraising efforts, we launched our brand new resource: **Creating Brave Spaces: Learnings from a Jewish-Christian Dialogue on Antisemitism**, in partnership with the West of Scotland Branch of the Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ). The product of two and a half years of dialogue on the topics of antisemitism and the criticism of the state of Israel, this resource is designed to help groups who would like to tackle high stakes issues in a constructive way. It includes the collected learning and reflections of the 12 participants



and two facilitators, a sample dialogue plan, descriptions of dialogue methods used, a case study and appendices. Although designed with controversial dialogue topics in mind, Creating Brave Spaces will be useful for all people seeking to engage in dialogue across difference. Georgina Bye, Co-Director of CCJ UK said, "We are deeply impressed...This resource offers really helpful guidance on how to create foundations of trust for difficult conversations". You can find the resource here: www.interfaithglasgow.org/publications/

"We are deeply impressed...This resource offers really helpful guidance on how to create foundations of trust for difficult conversations."
Georgina Bye, Co-Director CCJUK



Inverness Interfaith Group



On Saturday 22 July the Inverness Interfaith group held its annual picnic. After the long gap of the lockdown years, this was the first time our group managed to get together again in this way in significant numbers. We met in the grounds of St Ninian's Church at Glenurquhart, about half an hour's drive from Inverness; an idyllic beauty spot among trees by the shore of a loch. The weather was perfect with just enough wind to keep away the midges. Altogether a very enjoyable event and a boost for our spirits.



Faith Community News

Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society

Celebrating Ramadhan at St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral

On 17 April members of the Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society were welcomed by St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral in Edinburgh to mark our passage through the holy days and nights of Ramadhan. We were treated most hospitably and warmly, as prayers were issued for our community and all peoples in the human family.



Interfaith Peace Walk

The Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society and Wali al-Asir Trust were delighted to welcome the participants of Edinburgh Interfaith Association's Interfaith Peace Walk on 7 May. The walk had participants visit a colourful array of places of worship and faith communities in an effort to build bridges and visit neighbouring communities. The walk culminated at Wali Al Asir Trust where participants were greeted as guests and welcomed into the Mosque.

Lecture Series by Dr Tim Orr

Dr Tim Orr delivered a wonderful three days of interfaith programmes from 16 - 18 May as part of his Scottish Tour.

His lecture series was entitled 'How do I, a Christian, learn from Imam Jafar al-Sadiq?', an 8th century Shia Muslim scholar, jurist, and theologian. Dr Orr described the Imam's creativity, intelligence, nobility of character, his encouragement for learning, the way he handled adversity, and his ability to articulate his beliefs to people who didn't share his worldview. Thank you also to the supporting organisations for their invaluable support: Interfaith Scotland, Wali al-Asir Trust Edinburgh, and Masjid e Imam Ali a.s. Aberdeen.





Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service

The Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society was delighted to stand with our partners the Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service (SNBTS) at the Scottish Parliament on 16 June as part of National Blood Week and World Blood Donor Day. Blood donations are more vital than ever. Please donate and encourage others to do so.

6th Annual Eid al-Adha Dinner

The Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society returned post pandemic to holding its 6th Annual Eid al-Adha Dinner on 6 July in celebration of the Sacrifice of Abraham and the end of the Hajj season.



6th July, 2023 - The Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society returned post pandemic to holding its 6th Annual Eid al-Adha Dinner in celebration of the Sacrifice of Abraham and the end of the Hajj Season at The Trades House of Glasgow.

The evening was shared with senior faith leaders, as well as a wide cross-section of Scottish society over dinner at The Trades House of Glasgow. Breaking bread together in this way cements trust and establishes a basis for partnerships that make a difference to communities and society.

We thank the evening's speakers: Ballie Rashid Hussain on behalf of Lord Provost Jacqueline McLaren; Mr Bruce Reidford, Deacon Convener of The Trades House of Glasgow; The Rt Reverend Sally Foster-Fulton, Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland; The Most Reverend Leo

Cushley, Archbishop and Metropolitan of the Archdiocese of St Andrews & Edinburgh; The Most Rev Mark Strange, Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church; and Dr Joseph J Morrow, Lord Lyon King of Arms.

Sikh Community News



Sikh Community Hosts Pilgrims and the Coat of Hopes

On 29 July pilgrims from around the UK and the Coat of Hopes were welcomed to the Central Gurdwara in Glasgow.

The pilgrims sang a poem of hope as members of the Sikh community wore the Coat. The warmth and the weight of the Coat when worn was a truly spiritual experience. The pilgrims visited the prayer hall first and were then invited to share langar, a vegetarian meal given to all who visit the Gurdwara. Sikhs were delighted to host the pilgrims as in 2021 at the beginning of COP26 over 250 pilgrims from around the world were welcomed and given langar. A truly interfaith experience for all.

An Indian Spiritual Tradition

The Spiritual Significance of Raksha Bandhan

In a world filled with so much sound and speed, the sweetness of quiet moments has slipped out of our lives.

We find ourselves so engrossed in work and relationships that the sound of our own hearts, the principles we so dearly love and our love for God somehow become more and more faint. Raksha Bandhan, a tradition from India, commemorates a reconnection with the self and God. Raksha means 'protection' and Bandhan means 'bond'. A sacred thread called Rakhi is tied to a brother's wrist by his sister and Talik (a sandalwood paste) is applied on the forehead. This is the ceremonial expression of respect and love for her brother, blessing him with sayings such

as "May you be protected by God against all evil". Raksha Bandhan is also a promise by a brother for the protection of his sister even at the expense of his own life.

This action also has a spiritual significance. The physical Rakhi tied on the right wrist is to constantly remind all souls that we are all children of the one Supreme Father, making us brothers – a family of brotherhood. When the two ends of the thread meet, it symbolises friendship and connection with God



and the loving guidance and strength that come from the Divine. Applying the Tilak on one's forehead reminds us of our true spiritual nature as souls and that God is the true protector. In these actions, one takes a sacred divine vow with the Supreme to live a life of purity in thoughts, words and actions and become the embodiment of truth. This life of purity and the freedom from bondage elevates the soul to its original pure state, free from the bondage of this material world.

The Coronation of King Charles III and reflections on Kingship

In May 2023, King Charles III was crowned King at Westminster Abbey. On 5 July King Charles and Queen Camilla were presented with the Honours of Scotland at a National Service of Thanksgiving and Dedication at St Giles Cathedral, Edinburgh.

Both events included, for the first time in history, many interfaith elements and although the idea of Kingship is not without its controversy it has undoubtedly been a historic year for the UK and so we wanted to capture this in our Autumn Magazine. Two of our members who were involved in the service at St Giles Cathedral give their reflections below.



Ravinder Kaur Nijjar

Ravinder Kaur escorted the sceptre with Lady Dorian at the service. Speaking afterwards she said, **"It was an honour as a Sikh from Scotland to be involved in such a historical**

occasion, it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. His Majesty King Charles is very supportive of faith communities and their valuable contribution to humanity".

Srihari Vallabhajousula

The Dean of the Royal Chapel approached me to request if I would give a Hindu Blessing to the King and the Queen at the event. I was humbled to have been approached with such a request and knew instantly if I were to do it, the blessing should come from the heart. A Hindu priest is accustomed to giving blessings, however I had three challenges to overcome. Hindu blessings are largely in three or four words in the Sanskrit language and I was asked to provide a blessing in English in up to three or four sentences. Additionally, I had a complete lack of awareness of etiquette to address the King and the

Queen. The Dean was very supportive guiding me in this.

After toiling for five days, I wrote an appropriate blessing invoking Goddess Sri Lakshmi, God Sri Venkateswara (the deities closest to my heart) and preaching a very sacred principle for Hindus called Trikarana Suddhi - purity of thoughts, words and deeds to the Royal family in the conduct of their responsibility to serve and uplift people in the kingdom and commonwealth.

This is the first time ever in history that



other faiths and beliefs were given a ceremonial role. Our inclusion in the ceremony was a testament to the recognition of the value everyone holds in weaving the contemporary fabric of Scotland's society and this sentiment was echoed in the 1000s of messages of positive feedback that I received from across the world.

Interfaith Interactions: Kingship

Interfaith Scotland started a new online dialogue series titled **Interfaith Interactions** which in May was on the theme of 'Kingship' to commemorate the coronation of the King.

An abridged version of the four talks given at the event appear below. Recordings of the talks are also available to view on our YouTube channel at tinyurl.com/InterfaithInteractions. You can also scan the QR Code to view the video playlist.



Frances Hume: Christianity

In the Old Testament, which is known as the Hebrew Bible in the Jewish scriptures, God is likened to a king and the universe is God's kingdom. The scriptures declare "The Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all." This reign is not one of a powerful tyrant, but of a good and just ruler, God. However the people became impatient for an earthly king to rule them similar to the kings who ruled over the surrounding nations. God appointed Saul to be the first King of Israel but as the saying goes, power corrupts, and it is reported in the book of Samuel that Saul disobeyed God's commands and became arrogant so was ultimately rejected by God as King. In his place God sought another king and appointed a man named David. We are told that David was a 'man after God's own heart' so we see a model of what qualities God sought in an earthly king. David was a humble shepherd-boy who showed true worship and respect to God. David is credited as writing the Psalms which were hymns to God. In Psalm 23 David uses a metaphor for God as a Shepherd looking after and protecting his flock, so God is a king who cares for and protects his people.

Unfortunately many corrupt kings followed and the Jewish people were taken into exile, but God promised that out of David's descendents, a new anointed king would come to redeem Israel and establish his rightful place on the throne of Israel. The prophet Isaiah in Chapter 11 talks about this future king saying: **"The spirit of the Lord will give him wisdom and the knowledge and skill to rule his people. He will know the Lord's will and honour him and find pleasure in obeying him. He will not judge by appearance or hearsay; he will judge the poor fairly and defend the rights of the helpless. He will rule his people with justice and integrity".**

And so we move to the New Testament. Jesus grew up as a descendent of David and his followers came to believe that he was the fulfilment of the prophecy and would be God's chosen king. However he would not be an earthly king coming to save the Jewish people from their enemies and establish an earthly kingdom in Jerusalem but a heavenly King who would come to bring liberation to all the people of the world. This liberation would be two-fold, to bring justice and peace on earth through the good works of his followers and also to save all people from their sins so that they would go to a future

life in heaven after death where God reigns as king.

The life of Jesus can be seen as a model of the qualities of human kingship and also of God's kingship as Jesus is believed to be God

in human form. Jesus showed humility, being born into humble circumstances. He had no worldly wealth. He showed humility in his actions, for example washing his disciples feet before they had their Last Supper together which was seen as a job done by the lowliest servant.

Jesus is sometimes referred to as the 'Servant King'. When Jesus was on earth, he spent his entire life in service to others. He healed the sick, he fed the hungry, he was a friend to those who were ostracised by society at that time such as the prostitute and the tax collector. He told his disciples to do the same: "whoever would be great among you must be your servant". Many Christians believe that following Jesus' example Christians should work for justice to promote

the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven here on earth.

After his death and resurrection Christ is referred to as the "King of all Kings and the Lord of all Lords" in the book of 1 Timothy. Many Christians believe that Christ will return and create a new heaven and a new earth. The Kingship of Christ is celebrated in the Roman Catholic, Anglican and Lutheran Churches on 'Christ the King Sunday'.

If I may return to the Coronation of King Charles, like his mother Queen Elizabeth, he views his reign as one of service to the people. He takes the model of the life of Jesus as a 'Servant King'. I was touched that at the start of the Coronation it was a young boy, Samuel Strachan, Child of His Majesty's Chapel Royal, who addresses The King and says, "Your Majesty, as children of the kingdom of God we welcome you in the name of the King of Kings". King Charles replied, "In his name and after his example I come not to be served but to serve". Therefore King Charles as High Governor of the Church of England looks to emulate Jesus' example by using his earthly kingship to serve his people.



Dr Srihari Vallabhajousula: Hindu faith

I started my talk with a Sanskrit mantra 'Yogakshemo naha kalpantaam' which blesses achieving the ultimate aim of Kingship. It prays for a prosperous nation that has ensured the welfare and affluence of all sections of society along with ensuring moral, humane, and multi-dimensional development of the people.

Hindu literature has a very rich account of many great kings and the king who is adored and respected the most is Sri Rama. He is believed to be an Avatar of Vishnu (one of the main Hindu gods) who came down to earth not as God but as a human.

He was born to be a king but had to endure 14 years of hardship just like a fellow human. Sri Rama did not let this hardship change his character, his personality and his sense of duty to protect his people and punish evil. After overcoming this hardship Sri Rama returned to his people, his kingdom. The kingdom prospered ensuring the welfare and affluence of all sections of society. This happened 1000s of years ago and the optimism which marked the return of the king is still celebrated by Hindus to this day as the festival of Diwali, which for Hindus is the festival welcoming the Kingship of Sri Rama.

There is a Sanskrit phrase, Yatha Raaja, tathaa Prajaa: As the ruler so the people. The people willingly proactively took allegiance to follow the principles on which Sri Rama's kingship was based. The allegiance was to follow a way of life which we Hindus call Dharma and still continues in the life of Hindus to this day. Recently we celebrated Sri Rama's coronation, a religious ceremony at the Hindu Temple of Scotland in Glasgow. On 6 May, I was fondly watching the religious ceremony of the coronation of King Charles and I was amazed by the many similarities in the two coronation ceremonies.

Ven Ajahn Sujana: Buddhist Faith

I was born in Nepal during the reign of King Birendra and found that having a King was more stable for the country than the current republican state where political parties fight one another for the top seat of power. Since I came to the UK in 2005, I have found the country to be very peaceful and stable. Although Queen Elizabeth did not have any political power she always stood as a head of state, giving a good example and some form of assurance to people. She has been an example to all of us in this generation. Kingship offers stability and continuity in times of change.

As a citizen of the country, I feel an obligation or duty to mark royal occasions. In collaboration with Aberdeen Interfaith Group, we celebrated the Queen's platinum Jubilee at our Buddhist centre on 5 June 2022. We planted an Oak Tree in memory of the Queen and produced a booklet on the theme of Monarchy. It was a timely event. Three months later, the Queen died at Balmoral peacefully. On 9 September I personally went with another monk to do Memorial chanting to the Queen at the Balmoral Castle Gate.

Buddhism began with the enlightenment of the Buddha, who was born in Nepal. The Buddha came from a royal family but gave up all

those luxuries and power for peace and freedom not only for himself but for all humankind that lasted over 2600 years. After the enlightenment he spent 45 years teaching all levels of society from beggar to businesspeople, from intellectuals to religious leaders and political representatives to kings. According to the discourse on 'what came first', it is said that at the beginning human beings were collecting food straight from the forest to eat each day. Over time they began to store food. This action later led to land division and boundaries being created. Now, one of those beings was reckless. While guarding their own share they took another's share without it being given, and ate it, which led to violence. To aid in managing these disputes, social structure gradually formed and a protector was chosen, which later became the culture of King.

"Why don't we elect one who would rightly accuse, blame and expel those who deserve it? We shall pay them with a share of rice." (DN27, Aggannasutt)

The Buddhist scriptures record the noble duties of a monarch as providing just protection and security for your court, troops, aristocrats, vassals, brahmins and householders, people of town and country, ascetics and brahmins, beasts and birds. (DN26, Cakkavatti Sutta).

The King's responsibilities are summed up as follows:

- 1) **Dana:** Charity, generosity
- 2) **Sila:** High moral character, restraining any unskillful speech and physical actions.
- 3) **Pariccaga:** self-sacrifice: dedicating personal comfort for the happiness of the people.
- 4) **Aajjava:** honesty and integrity in carrying out royal duties.
- 5) **Maddava:** kindness and gentleness.
- 6) **Tapa:** self-control and non-indulgence: not indulging in luxurious royal life or exploiting power.
- 7) **Akkodha:** non-anger or non-fury. It means not making any decisions under the influence of anger.
- 8) **Avihimsa:** non-violence; non-oppression
- 9) **Khanti:** patience and forbearance; tolerance.
- 10) **Avirodhana:** non-opposition; non-deviation from righteousness; conformity to the law.

If King Charles III fulfils his responsibility with as many principles from those 10 as possible he would not only bring continuity to the monarchy and kingship but also bring stability and prosperity to the country.

The Baha'i Faith and Sovereigns

Baha'u'llah (Prophet founder of the Baha'i Faith) was born in 1817 into one of Persia's most noble and privileged families. His father in fact worked for the Shah (the King of Persia at that time). However, when Baha'u'llah challenged the authorities, he was stripped of his wealth, imprisoned, tortured and eventually exiled from Iran to Iraq, from Iraq to Turkey and then eventually to the prison City of Akka in Palestine (now Israel). While still a prisoner (in Turkey and in Akka/Israel), Baha'u'llah wrote to the kings and rulers of the world including; Emperor Napoleon 11, Queen Victoria, Kaiser Wilhelm 1, Tsar Alexander 11, Emperor Franz Joseph, Pope Pius IX, Sultan Abdul-Aziz, and the Iranian ruler, Nasri'd-Din Shah. He urged the leaders to pursue justice and disarmament and exhorted them to band together into a commonwealth of nations, warning them of the dire consequences should they fail to establish peace.

"O kings of the earth! We see you increasing every year your expenditures, and laying the burden thereof on your subjects. This, verily, is wholly and grossly unjust...lay not excessive burdens on your peoples. Do not rob them to rear palaces for yourselves... your people are your treasures. ...By them ye rule, by their means ye subsist, by their aid ye conquer.

O Queen in London! ...We have been informed that thou hast forbidden the trading in slaves, both men and women. This, verily, is what God has enjoined. We have also heard that thou hast entrusted the reins of counsel into the hands of the representatives of the people. Thou, indeed, hast done well, for thereby the foundations of the edifice of thine affairs will be strengthened, and the hearts of all that are beneath thy shadow, whether high or low, will be tranquillized" (from his letter to Queen Victoria).

Queen Marie of Romania (1875-1938), who was the granddaughter of Queen Victoria, became a Baha'i and was the first member of a Royal family to

do so. Queen Marie was one of most popular royal figures in Europe because of the significant personal risks she took treating cholera victims and the wounded during the World War. She was seen across Europe as a particularly effective leader and she impressed the suffragettes in the West as "a woman..... who had used the gifts given her to further every good purpose."

I had the honour of meeting two Kings (Heads of State) from the Island of Samoa. In Samoa, the idea of a King or Head of State can only be understood through the lens of their chiefly system known as Fa'a Matai. At the apex of this system are the four major title holders - known as the Tama-a-Aiga. On gaining independence from colonial powers on 1 January 1962 two of these title holders became joint heads of state, Malietoa Tunamafili the 11 and Tupua Tamasese Leolofi (sadly Tupua Tamasese died in 1963) and the Malietoa was then the sole Head of State for life - and he remained such until his death in 2007, aged 95. In October 1967 His Highness Malietoa Tunamafili 11 became a Baha'i and remained a dedicated Baha'i all his life.

In 1997 my husband Nick and I had the honour of meeting him and presenting him with a Scottish Quach as a gift from the Baha'i community of Scotland. The Malietoa passed away on the evening of 11 May 2007 and I was privileged to be in Samoa at that time to witness the incredible grief and



powerful way the indigenous people of Samoa mourned their King and to hear the tributes pouring in from all over the world.

On the passing of His Highness Malietoa Tunamafili 11, a new Head of State was appointed, Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Tupuola Tufuga Efi. Over a number of visits to Samoa, my husband Nick and I, developed a warm friendship with His Highness Tupua, and his wife Mafioso Filifilia Tamasese, and so when he was awarded an

honorary Doctorate by St Andrew's University in Scotland, we were invited to his graduation ceremony and were deeply honoured to be present. From this invitation evolved the opportunity to co-host with His Highness an interfaith/indigenous conference to

explore the climate crisis. His Highness Tupua has published many papers and books dealing with the indigenous approach to the environment and the conference was an incredible and deeply moving experience. In my mind, Tupua and Filifilia are truly royal and they served not just the people of Samoa but humanity in general.

In conclusion I have decided that if a king (or queen) is a just king or queen, and has a genuine love and concern for humanity then they can act as a powerful symbol of unity not just for their own nation but to the world.

"Regard for the rank of Sovereigns is divinely ordained... the majesty of kingship is one of the signs of God. We do not wish that the countries of the world should be deprived thereof"
- Baha'u'llah

Parliament of the World Religions

Parliament of the World Religions, Chicago (2023)



The Parliament of the World Religions took place in Chicago from 14 - 18 August.

The organisation was founded in 1893 to cultivate harmony among the world's religious and spiritual communities and to foster their engagement with the world and its guiding institutions to address the critical issues of our time. It brings together civic, spiritual, and grassroots changemakers from across the world.

The Importance of Interfaith Spaces

The Director of Interfaith Scotland was delighted to take part in an international collaborative project with interfaith activists from across America and Canada that explored the importance of Interfaith Spaces.

Dr Maureen Sier joined a panel of experts which included the following; John Towndrow, Co-Founder of the Cornwall Interfaith Partnership, Ontario, Canada; Brian Carwana, Executive Director of Encounter World Religions, Guelph, Canada; Barbara Heims, Muslim Chaplain for the Canadian Armed Forces; Ruth Broyde Sharone, Co-Founder of the Southern California Parliament of World Religions; Paul McKenna, Co-ordinator of the Golden Rule Poster Project, Scarboro Missions, Canada; Aziz Azizullah, Cornwall, Ontario; Rev Steve Albert, Director of World Interfaith Network, California and Leslie Merzei a Holocaust



Survivor from Canada. Together this prestigious panel worked with Neil MacMillan from the Baha'i Community of Canada to create an online resource that was used as a central piece of an in-person workshop at the World Parliament in Chicago. The feedback from the workshop has been excellent and this has led to further collaboration and the creation of an excellent workbook and interfaith educational resource.

Further Engagement from Scotland

Iain Stewart, Executive Director of Edinburgh Interfaith Association, was able to attend the World Parliament of Religions in person and was delighted to do a presentation/workshop at the Parliament on countering hate speech, hate crime and intercommunal tensions.

Commenting on his experience at the World Parliament Iain stated:

"Attending a Parliament of the World Religions is like nothing you will ever experience. The Parliament Convenings attracted over 7,000 participants, including key religious leaders from across the Globe from more than 212 diverse religious, indigenous, and secular beliefs and more than 80 nations".

Prestigious Award for former Chair of Interfaith Scotland

We are delighted that Ravinder Kaur Nijjar, former Chair of Interfaith Scotland and Chair of Religions for Peace UK Women of Faith Network, received the Religions for Peace Lifetime Service Award for Multi-Religious Peacebuilding at an event jointly organised by The Ansari Institute for Global Engagement with Religion and Religions for Peace International at the Parliament of the World Religions.



The award recognises faith actors who have made vital contributions in their communities to advance peace and human dignity and Ravinder was presented the award by Chief Rabbi David Rosen, Co-President of Religions for Peace.

Ravinder said, "I am deeply honoured and humbled to receive this prestigious

award. First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to God for giving me the opportunity to serve, this award belongs to God." Ravinder was also part of the Sikh delegation who served langar, a vegetarian meal, to all 8000 participants daily. Selfless service to God's Creation and feeding the hungry is an essential part of the Sikh religion.

Launch of Religions for Peace UK Women of Faith Network Gender Equality Empowerment for All "Dialogue to Action" Toolkit

A diverse group of people from different faith and belief traditions gathered together both in-person and online to participate in the UKWFN Symposium. We welcomed speakers from our Women in Religious Scriptures webinars and Male Allies from 16 Days against Gender-based Violence campaign to share their thoughts on how we can practically bring about gender equality. The talks from our Male Allies and Women in Religious Scriptures are available to view

on YouTube at <https://tinyurl.com/genderequalitytalks>

In the afternoon participants took part in workshops designed to give first-hand experience in using the Toolkit within their communities using the project methodology in the Toolkit. The Toolkit gives the context for UKWFN's projects, shares our experiences of delivering the projects, our methodology, and gives further scope for development. Our aim is to see the

Religions for Peace UK Women of Faith Network launched a new Toolkit 'Gender Equality - Empowerment for All - From Dialogue to Action' on 15 June during the Gender Equality - Empowerment for All symposium at the St Ethelburga's Centre for Peace and Reconciliation, London.

Toolkit being used by faith, interfaith, secular communities/groups, and educational/governmental sectors to challenge the inequalities that exist in our communities and society. You can download the Toolkit at: www.rfpuk.org/resources/202306TOOLKIT.pdf

If you would like to collaborate with UKWFN in using the Toolkit and make Gender Equality a reality please contact us at rknijjar@ukwfn.org

Ravinder Kaur Nijjar



Meeting Room For Hire

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- 58-inch wall mounted large monitor with built-in speaker
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Are you looking for a suitable venue to hold your meetings and events?

We are delighted to announce that Interfaith Scotland's Dialogue Centre is now available for hire. Strategically located only two miles north of Glasgow City Centre, our Dialogue Centre is near a number of busy bus routes and within a 5-minute walk of Springburn train station. Room capacity is 40 people maximum, and we can accommodate custom layouts of chairs and tables. We offer reduced rates to our Members, Local Interfaith Groups and Friends.



For more information

Please visit our website page tinyurl.com/DialogueRoomHire or scan the QR Code. Email dialoguecentre@interfaithscotland.org for room booking enquiries.

Get Involved!

There's lots of ways of getting involved in the work of Interfaith Scotland. Here are just a few!

Become a Friend

Becoming a Friend of Interfaith Scotland is a great way to support our work. Our Friends are individuals, groups and organisations who are passionate about interfaith work and the impact it makes on communities. For a small subscription fee you can receive our newsletter, annual report and invitations to attend interfaith events organised by Interfaith Scotland. Email admin@interfaithscotland.org for more details.

Scottish Interfaith Week

We can provide you with ideas and advice for setting up an event in your area to celebrate Scottish Interfaith Week. We can advertise your event on our Scottish Interfaith Week website at www.scottishinterfaithweek.org. Small amounts of funding are also available for local interfaith groups to assist with events. Email info@scottishinterfaithweek.org for more details.

Local Interfaith Groups

We can help you get in touch with the nearest interfaith group in your area. If there is no interfaith group in your area we can help you to set one up and provide advice and support for the group. Email frances@interfaithscotland.org for more details.

Schools and Youth Groups

We have volunteers from different faiths who are available to speak in schools and youth groups about their faith and/or the importance of interfaith dialogue. We have also created interfaith resources for schools and youth groups available at the office and on the website. Email frances@interfaithscotland.org for more details.

Women's Interfaith Dialogue

We host women's interfaith dialogue events in different towns and cities in Scotland throughout the year. Get in touch if you would be interested in us hosting a women's dialogue in your area. Email frances@interfaithscotland.org for more details.

Training

Our Religion and Belief Training Programme trains organisations from the statutory, voluntary and public sector to develop their understanding of the diversity of faiths in Scotland; conform to the Religion and Belief Equality legislation; and to be sensitive to the needs of the religion and belief communities they serve. Email jamie@interfaithscotland.org for more details.

Resources

We have produced a number of useful publications and resources which are available at the office or can be downloaded from our website.

Donate to our work

You can donate to our work by contacting us at admin@interfaithscotland.org for further details. We use Gift Aid so please let us know if you would like to make a Gift Aid donation.





Interfaith Scotland

**Making a Difference
through Dialogue**

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